

ANIMAL TALES *OF THE* ROCKIES



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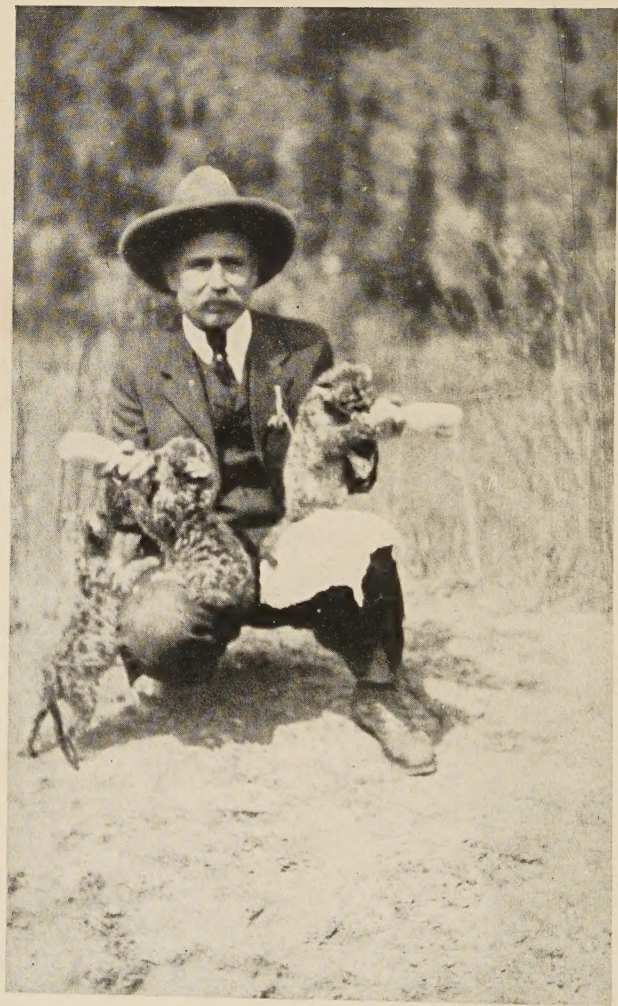


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THE CHRONICLE OF AN OLD TOWN
OLD BLACK BASS



BABY COUGARS BEING RAISED ON THE BOTTLE

ANIMAL TALES OF THE ROCKIES



BY
ALBERT BENJAMIN
CUNNINGHAM



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To these four:

AUNT POLLY

JAMES

AUNT B. AND

ELSIE,

all of Pine Knot Ranch, this
book is affectionately dedicated.

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THE PROWLER

THE coyote's head appeared noiselessly above the two large stones that formed the lower boundary of the den. A head larger than that of a fox and smaller than a dog's, it remained for two minutes perfectly motionless while its owner took stock of the surroundings.

The ears were erect and pointed, quivering to catch the faintest sound. The air was absolutely still, but the moist, sensitive muzzle sniffed it inquiringly. About the eyes was evident weariness, but in their depths was the wild, cruel look of the untamed.

The head moved and the coyote stood atop the flat stone, sharply silhouetted. The body was lean, the hip joints showing under the sandy hair; and it was the body of a female, her teats darkly flabby and the udders dry. Beneath her in the den the sleepy murmurs of her litter of five told why.

She stretched herself, front legs advanced

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and hind legs extended, her body drawn and slender. She yawned, her half-furled tongue extending and retreating with a whimpering sound.

Still she was watchful. A cow-bird alighted on an alder, and the coyote whirled, though a human ear could not have caught the sound. She sprang, and so quickly that the slow-moving bird left feathers in the snapping jaws.

The scent of close prey energized the Prowler. With a rhythmic gait she struck out, skirting the edge of the woods above the weathered bank of the stream.

A jack rabbit jumped tentatively from its squat in a tuft of grass, and ere it sensed its danger the coyote was snapping over it. With one enormous bound the rabbit was free and away.

But the Prowler was not to be so easily eluded; she leaped in hot pursuit. There was difference in the gait of the two; the rabbit ran stiffly, almost awkwardly, its seeming clumsiness belying its incredible speed, while the coyote flashed forward at bounds, like the glancing flight of an arrow.

But of a sudden the jack stopped, standing

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for an instant on his hind legs, then whirled and back-tracked, passing his pursuer in mid-flight. The coyote drew up, turned, but too late; its prey was not to be seen.

Baffled, she stopped, threw her head into the air, and sniffed keenly. She drooped, as if to make herself as inconspicuous as possible. She had caught a scent, and knew that a pocket gopher was near.

She trotted a hundred yards, the scent growing stronger. There was an excited whir-r-r as the picket-pin ran for its hole.

The Prowler grew cunning. Quickly she made the clump of wild roses near which was the gopher's hole, and noiselessly she dropped behind it.

There was no sound save the intermittent call of the red squirrel in the pines above. Even the Prowler's panting was accomplished noiselessly through open mouth.

The picket-pin came to the mouth of its hole, stepping cautiously, advancing one forefoot after the other, in perfect silence. It reached the mound of earth raised when the hole was excavated, then stood erect on its haunches, front feet folded neatly at its breast.

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For long it stood thus, motionless. Only the shifting of its eyes testified to its alertness. Behind the rose bushes the Prowler crouched, head on paws indrawn.

The gopher sensed danger and voiced it in quick drawn chicks, its body vibrating with the effort. But it grew calm. No danger manifested itself.

It dropped to all-fours and made exploration toward its feeding grounds. One yard it moved and the Prowler's muscles bunched under the skin. A few more steps and she could reach it ere it could return to safety.

Again the gopher stood erect, its gray and white body rigid as a stake. But it dropped again and shuffled to a shoot of wild clover.

A sandy streak flashed through the air. The gopher made instantly to turn, but found its retreat blocked. It flattened out on the ground, tail straight behind and wormed this way and that, but red jaws closed upon it.

The Prowler continued her way more contentedly. At least the fierce pangs of hunger were allayed. She began a leisurely ascent of the hill.

She picked up a scent of fresh meat in a

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clump of Oregon grapes, and followed it eagerly. It led up the hill to the ridge, then out. It smelled strongly, and moisture dripped from her tongue as she followed it. Out almost to the point of the ridge she followed it, then saw it ahead of her, a dead jack rabbit lying as if thrown against the roots of a yellow pine.

But she did not pounce upon it. An innate sense of caution bade her pause. She sniffed the ground about, daintily, carefully, stopping abruptly when almost to the pine and drawing back from a place which to the human eye looked exactly like the surrounding territory.

She stood stock still. Her muzzle wrinkled and she turned her head toward the rabbit. Then her body drooped. With a look of disappointment she picked her way around the place and continued toward the point.

For while she preyed on life, others preyed on her. This was a trap, baited and set by Uncle James of Pine Knot Ranch, to rid the woods of her and her kind.

The point was formed by a large flat stone on whose outer rim grew a fringe of stunted

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cedars. From this vantage, and herself unseen, the Prowler was wont to view the valley below.

It held fascination for her, this valley. Straight across as the eagle would fly was the mighty sweep of the Rockies, cut by the narrow road that lifts to the Great Divide. Over there the yellow pines, where they grew at all, were solitary, lifting their straight boles mightily. But for the most part the hills were bare and brown, and back among them lonely prospectors were lured by thought of gold.

Through the valley the blue waters of the Bitter Root hurried westward. And in the center on a knoll of green was the Pine Knot Ranch—a pretentious place, the residence flanked by bunk house and garage and barns and chicken house.

Aye, chicken house. And as the Prowler lay on the flat stone of her lofty look-out she watched these chickens craftily. Now her eye would burn eagerly, or her body would crouch as if she made ready for the spring.

A white Plymouth Rock flew venture-somely from the barnyard to the meadow



"AND IN THE CENTER ON A KNOLL OF GREEN WAS THE PINE KNOT RANCH
—A PRETENTIOUS PLACE"

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and industriously sought out grasshoppers, unconsciously moving toward the willows that skirted the stream.

The coyote lifted stealthily from the rock and began a sure and noiseless descent. Every hundred yards or so she stopped and sniffed the air as if searching for some presence, but each time seemed satisfied. She feared Lion, the great Airedale that stood guard over Pine Knot; but that day he was with James at the sheep camp.

Deftly she crossed the bog which was treacherous swamp, leaping from tuft to tuft of the marsh grass. Twice she slipped and sank treacherously into the black slime, but recovered and went on.

She forded the stream and slunk in and out among the willows. She crept within thirty feet of the chicken, then boldly leaped into the open and bore down.

The frightened fowl ran and flew toward the shelter of the barn, but was overhauled. With a deft movement of her head the Prowler tossed the body up on her back and started to make away.

The ancient dog, Spot, of the Pine Knot Ranch, attracted by the uproar, came charg-

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ing past the barn and out on the field. His teeth were bare in a vicious snarl.

The coyote is a coward in the presence of danger; and the Prowler had ample time to escape. But to-day her mood was sullen; and besides, she knew the harmlessness of old Spot. She dropped the chicken and advanced on him, snarling and stiff-legged.

Her eyes were wholly cruel, glowing red with hot anger and vindictive rage. The rusty body, bedraggled with water and slime, showed still more cavernous and austere.

Before such attack old Spot ignominiously dropped tail and fled; when the Prowler, not humorously, as would a dog, but sullenly after the manner of her kind, picked up the fowl and made for the hills.

The coyote breeds once a year, the mating season being in January or February. The period of gestation is sixty-three days, bringing the birth of the litter up well to the Spring, with from four to eight in the litter.

The den of the Prowler was typical—an old abandoned badger hole among the rocks well up from the stream. When she reached it, carrying the chicken on her

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shoulder, the five small coyotes were in the mouth of the den, playful as so many puppies.

They would be abandoned by the mother in July, and already she was weaning them to solid foods. She pulled the chicken to pieces and dropped them among the pushing, shoving little ones, to be devoured amid growls meant to be fierce. But the major portion of the carcass she ate herself. Then all crawled into the den and settled for the night.

Toward midnight it rained, a quiet steady drizzle that wet and chilled. But instinct had provided for such a contingency; the nest materials of the coyote lay on the ledge of a rock, separated by a small fissure from the main floor. The water ran in in tiny rivulets, but disappeared through the fissure, leaving the nest cozy and dry.

About an hour before dawn a shuffling step was heard without, followed by a sniffing at the stones. The mother coyote growled threateningly, while the little ones burrowed closer, though imitating her growl.

Perfectly well did the Prowler know the

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identity of the animal without, for to her the scent of the Black Bear was unmistakable. But the bear seemed only curious, and a moment later his step was heard farther up the hill. The Prowler curled up again and slept.

It was late the next morning when she stuck her head above the rocks and took stock of the surroundings. The ground was wet; a chill of dampness and fog hung in the air. She seemed reluctant to venture forth. But hunger drove her out.

Hunger was her master, summer and winter; its ruthless pressure was ever felt. The gopher hibernated during the winter and warm in his small nest underground, he slept through the bleak months. And the squirrel, while not hibernating, yet laid in a supply of food to tide over the lean months. But the Prowler neither hibernated nor laid in supply for a rainy day. Winter and summer, dry and wet, she foraged or starved.

The water that hung on the undergrowth was now stinging cold to her legs. Her tail soon became bedraggled and stringy.

She walked slowly, now sniffing the

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ground for scent, now circling to explore in the top of a fallen pine. Once she came upon some feathers and small bones where a hawk had feasted on a camp-robber. The kill and the feast were but recent; and the Prowler licked the still-moist bones.

She picked up the scent of a field mouse near a rotten log and followed it industriously. A round hole the size of a person's thumb showed where the little rodent had gone under the log. The Prowler inserted her nose and sniffed; withdrew it and looked intently, then began to dig.

The rotted wood and soft earth yielded readily, flying back from her front paws. She inserted her nose again, expelling her breath in a low snorting sound. She reared up and looked over the log just in time to see the small gray body streaking over the pine needles and leaves. And if the mouse was quick, she was quicker. She was after it in one long leap, running low, turning as it turned, her mouth ever closer. It ran under a leaf, and her paw was on the leaf, pinning it down. There was a frantic squirming, but the other paw descended. With her nose she pushed aside the leaf,

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exposing the mouse held down by her left paw. She got it in her mouth and crushed it, then threw it high into the air, catching it as it came down. She swallowed it practically without mastication.

She was going on up the hill. There was sudden commotion above her, and a dark object came hurtling toward her. She jumped straight up, and with marvelous contortion of body, changed course in mid-air and bounded away. Then she discovered it was merely a stone that had broken from a mass of shale and rolled down the mountain.

She heard the whir-r-r-r of a pine squirrel, little brother to the red squirrel and older brother of the chipmunk. Immediately her knees bent and she went crouching toward the sound. It came from a cluster of lodgepole pines beyond a draw.

She saw it, sitting two yards up, on a dead limb, its "Ke-chick! ke-chick! ke-chick!" punctuated by a jerk of its tail for each. The Prowler watched it gloomily, knowing it was out of reach. But a faint digging noise a little down the hill made her look that way. A second squirrel

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was there, digging industriously in the loose earth.

The Prowler dropped to her belly and with infinite patience began to creep up on this second squirrel. She made absolutely no sound, lifting one foreleg at a time, head low, red eyes blazing with alertness.

The squirrel in the tree was crying "Danger!" but it had begun too soon; it had heard the stone roll down the hill, fancied an imminent danger, ran to safety, and set up a warning call. And while now it cried out against this new foe, its mate did not understand.

Yet with the sixth sense of the wild it must have been warned, for it ran a foot up a lodgepole and stopped, hugging the trunk. It climbed another foot and turned head-downward, its head lifted almost at right angles with its body. It gave one answering call to its mate, hesitated, then descended and ran on the ground, going directly toward the coyote.

When it finally saw its danger in the sandy body that hurtled toward it, it had to turn; and the turn took too long. But it was not caught at once.

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It darted between the coyote's legs, whirled about giddily, its tail flat behind it. It made a queer muttering sound as it ran. It fairly tore up the dirt with its small feet as it whirled and dodged.

The snapping jaws finally caught a hind leg and closed remorselessly upon it. Quick as light the squirrel twisted about and buried its sharp teeth in the Prowler's muzzle.

A dog might have howled and thus released its hold. But to the coyote life was a daily fight for food. She thrust her head down, pinning the squirrel to the ground with the very muzzle to which it held; then opening the lower jaw she caught the hind quarters and closed.

The squirrel was a dainty morsel, a delicacy; and after partaking of it the Prowler went to the river—though at this elevation the "river" was scarce three yards wide. She waded into the blue, cold, hurrying water and lapped it noisily.

Again on the bank she hesitated. Her head was to the wind, but she seemed not to be trying to fathom its secret, but to be intent to place some obscure memory that haunted her. Thus a dog will hesitate and

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whimper, drawing his brows together in perplexity, only in the end to trot purposefully away.

So the Prowler; her perplexity vanished, and she went at a leisurely trot up the stream. A mile up there was a deep hole where the water swirled about a great boulder and veered off almost at right angles.

Arrived here, the coyote carefully smelled over the ground to make sure there was no hidden danger, then went down almost to the water and began to paw about among the large dock leaves. She kept at this till she had minutely covered several square yards. When she finally ceased, her expression was of disappointment similar to that which characterized her when she had to go on and leave the jack rabbit that baited the trap.

Two weeks before she had chanced on this spot about five o'clock of the afternoon. A rare yet pleasant scent had lured her to the bank; where, pawing under some leaves, she had found a cache of mountain trout which a fisherman had hidden there to lighten his creel, intending to pick them up on the return trip down.

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These the Prowler had eaten, to the last scaleless catch; and to-day the presence of the water stirred memory of this former feast. Again she circled the spot, loath to leave.

Turning to leave she glanced up and saw another coyote on the bank above her. She bristled sullenly, emitting a low growl. The other stood motionless, waiting for her to come up. They did not come as near together as would dogs, but stood farther apart, sniffing and walking in circles, alert constantly.

Contrary to popular thought, the coyotes do not run in packs, but are inclined to be solitary. They gather in numbers only through the pressure of hunger, when group hunting is necessary to bring down larger prey such as sheep or calves.

So now the two were wary, though the newcomer inclined to be friendly. He reared back on his hind legs and threw up his head in the familiar invitation to frolic. For a little the Prowler joined him, and the two ran playfully up the river and struck out into the hills.

But the Prowler lost zest and began more

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and more frequently to stop and sniff, her head pointing back toward the valley. She snapped her new acquaintance roundly, and, though expressing a sense of injury, he left her.

Again she lay on the flat stone overlooking the valley. And as before she seemed to experience a nameless fascination. Two miles down from Pine Knot Ranch, and clearly visible to her, was the Ranger Station, where the forest ranger lived. In front of the log house, the American flag fluttered from a pole. The Prowler watched the movements of the bright colors.

Two or three times a year this Ranger cut much meat up into chunks of half a pound. Cleverly into each piece he inserted dry crystals of strychnia sulphate, a deadly poison. Then he scattered the meat in places likely to be haunted by the coyote; and many of the Prowler's kind had been killed in this manner.

She fixed her eyes on Pine Knot. The chickens were scratching about near the irrigation ditch that flowed between the house and the barn.

Suddenly the Prowler crouched as if to

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make herself less conspicuous. James had stepped from the house and picked up a long-handled shovel. He went out to the front gate and started up the road.

Bounding after him was the great Airedale, seemingly raw-boned and awkward, but in reality a marvelous organism whose strength knew no bounds and to whom fear was unknown.

Narrowly the Prowler watched man and dog; and as they went up the road her mien indicated satisfaction. More eagerly she looked again at the ranch house, then swung to the right around the stone and dropped down the mountain. A mother grouse flew up at the edge of the meadow, and half impatiently the Prowler swerved. Five minutes and she had found her nest. She sucked the eggs cleanly, breaking them with a downward thrust of her nose. She licked the broken shells when she had finished, then continued on her way.

But there was one thing she did not see. When he had reached the place where the road swerved in to the base of the mountain, James sent the Airedale back home. The big dog was disappointed but took it philo-

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sophically. He did not go back by the road, but kept to the mountain side of the meadow. Farther down he could cross the stream and make home by the barnyard.

In the willows below the barn the Prowler lay for all of five minutes, keeping intent watch, and hoping a venturesome fowl might essay the meadow, but they all kept up near the ditch where some grain had been scattered.

Finally her patience gave out. She got to her feet, walked four rods stealthily with head low, then at a brisk lope made the open space and was in the midst of the flock. There was a terrific cackling as the chickens scattered, some running wildly and others flying. But a Buff Orpington was not quick enough. With a shower of feathers the Prowler snapped her up; and slinging her to her shoulder by simply seeming to get the shoulder in place as she came down, she made for the willows.

She was nearing the woods when she saw, directly in her path but about fifty yards away, the loose, sandy form of the great Airedale.

He was standing stock still, his homely

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head low, his forefeet wide apart. For all the awkwardness of the pose there was suggestion of tense readiness that was alarming.

The Prowler came to a dead stop, looked quickly about, and veered to the right, running carefully. But the Airedale paralleled her course, keeping always between her and escape. She drew back toward the willows, but he followed. She dropped the chicken and seemed to ponder, licking her lips nervously.

Leaving the chicken where it lay, she adopted the true gait of her kind, the slink, and running partly sidewise but now upstream, she endeavored to make the mountain. But again thwarted, she resorted to cunning. Dropping to her belly she lay flat against the ground motionless. Ten minutes she remained thus, hoping to weary her enemy.

But, though for a time she could see that he stood still in his tracks, she soon discovered that he drew nearer. Step by step, but ever on the alert for a quick start from her, he was lessening the distance between them.

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Then, because the coyote is a coward, she sprang away and ran wildly for the mountain. But she could make it only by passing him. And because a coward, when compelled to fight, often contends with cruel viciousness partly because of the high terror of the conflict, she met the onslaught of the Airedale in kind.

The hairs of her lean body fairly stood on end with fury. Her red bickering eyes had in them no element of mercy or understanding, but raged with remorseless cruelty. Yellow fangs bared to the accompaniment of a high shrill snarl.

But the Airedale knew not fear. He took up the fight because he loved it, and because in some vague manner he knew that the master whom he adored would want him to give an account of himself.

The fighting methods of the two were wholly different. The she-coyote, strung high with terror, snapped and whirled only to snap again. Her fangs pierced flesh only to loose and seek another spot.

In one respect bodily they differed markedly—the mighty chest of the Airedale, which held his forelegs widely apart. And

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in this broad chest was his high heart, a heart loyal to one man and utterly tireless.

For ten minutes they fought, beating down the marsh grass, tearing up the callow sod as with a fine rake. The Airedale's lips dripped with his own blood, his ears were in ribbons. There was a deep gash on the back of his neck. One foot was chewed and swollen. But his stub of a tail kept up a rhythmic wagging that spoke of sheer joy of conflict.

But at the end of ten minutes the Prowler saw the end. With her own kind she had contended and won; with Nature she had struggled and survived, but she realized that here was one she could never conquer.

She was on the side toward the timber. She made one quick vicious charge that drove the Airedale backward, then whirled and ran.

The dog pursued, bounding mightily. But once in the woods the Prowler had the advantage. Even so, the Airedale kept stubbornly on. When he lost sight of the coyote, he tracked her, determined to find her and finish the battle. But as if anticipating this, the Prowler, when a half mile

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below her den, swerved to the stream and walked in it for two hundred yards, thus covering her tracks.

For three days the coyote kept to the den. At night she crawled within and slept, her little ones about her. Of day she lay out in front on the flat stone, licking her wounds. The only movement she made was to walk painfully to the stream and lap up the cold water.

Then with the healing of the wounds she gave command to her litter. The den was to be abandoned. Slowly she started up the stream, her third-grown puppies following. Where the river turned to the right, she stopped and looked back. It was to be her last sight of the old den.

Over beyond Gallogly Peak, over in Idaho, was another valley, a valley of peace and security. She pricked up her ears, growled commandingly at her progeny, and started the ascent of the Peak.

THE BARBARIAN

TWO inches of virgin snow, the first fall of the year, lay like a fleecy carpet over the valley. On the somber mountains the great pines drooped like shrouded statues under their covering of white.

Up the road went James and the big Airedale to look after the sheep. As they reached the little wooden bridge over the creek James read a melancholy tale in the snow: small feet had trampled it down; soft rufous feathers of the snowbird still fluttered about; a few scarlet stains told where the bird had given up its life. A small track left the spot, crossed the bridge, and zigzagged into the meadow.

The Airedale sniffed the spot inquiringly, while James stopped to examine the tracks. He then spoke to the dog, as one companion to another: "Lion, old boy, it was a weasel, the meanest and cruellest varmint that walks the earth. I wish you would catch him." He pointed to the small tracks.

THE BARBARIAN

The Airedale understood perfectly. He poked his snout into the snow, shoving his muzzle far down, inhaling deeply and expelling his breath with a snort, as if to get the scent of this condemned species ineradicably fixed in his mind. Henceforth he would hunt it down remorselessly. With an excited waggle of his tail he followed the tracks.

Into the meadow they led him, down to a clump of willows where the creek made a bend, out past the old fence that had been builded around a haystack two summers before. They were inquisitive tracks, and restless; pausing now where bunch grass stood up raggedly gray above the pure white, snooping under a rotting log, slipping under the old rail fence at the far side of the meadow and following it for a hundred yards.

Then, a hundred feet ahead, a gray body whirled and sniffed the air. His nose went up and his red eyes flamed with apprehension. A scent was in the air and he tried to pull it down.

It was the weasel, rightly called the Barbarian, the fiercest and most fearless of all

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the smaller mammals. He lifted to his haunches, like a surprised gopher, and for a moment was motionless.

He was not afraid, but he was too far from his den to make it should he be overtaken; and he disliked to hole up save in his own den. In unfamiliar places it was too much like being trapped.

Keeping the tuft of grass between him and the dog, he made a detour to reach the timber. But with a few bounds the Airedale was between him and escape and bearing furiously down upon him.

When he realized that escape was cut off the Barbarian turned and showed fight. Nothing could better illustrate the savage fearlessness of the weasel than this, that he was willing to fight with this dog forty times his size. For the weasel is without fear. He has even, with an utter ferocity, attacked grown men.

As the Airedale closed in with open mouth, the Barbarian met him with a cruel slash on the lips and dodged between his legs. The dog turned, but the smaller animal was quicker; he was away and fairly tearing across the snow.

THE BARBARIAN

When the dog was almost upon him again, the weasel veered sharply to the right, the dog rushing by, requiring several steps to check himself. Once the slender body leaped clear over the dog and made for an old gopher hole. Overtaken again, he made a second attempt to slip between the Airedale's legs. But the dog dropped on him and pinned him down. Even then the fight was not over, for sharp teeth and claws tore viciously at the dog's belly.

The Airedale lifted and squirmed sideways, endeavoring to thrust his snout under him and get the weasel in his teeth; but the Barbarian leaped suddenly free, made the old fence in a few desperate bounds, and reached the comparative safety of his own den. While fighting they had gradually worked toward it, so that now it could be made, whereas at the beginning it could not.

Lion reached the den at the root of a stunted fir, thrust his nose into the small hole, looked quickly up and about as if fearing his quarry might escape, then began to dig, his mighty paws hurtling the dirt far down the bank. A small root got in his

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way, but he took it in his teeth and tore it away.

The muffled sound of digging within excited him beyond all measure. Shoving his nose into the opening he snorted twice, an eager whine escaping him.

But in the end he gave it up. The opening he had made resembled an inverted horn, wide at the surface but tapering toward the end. In vain he snorted, jerked back and looked eagerly up the bank. It was no use. Finally he turned disappointedly and trotted back whence he had come.

Within the den was the Barbarian, now secure from attack. In length he was twelve inches; the gray-brown of his back shading to light underneath. A small, slender body, a wedge-shaped head, and red, cold, beady eyes.

Since reaching his own den he had not been frightened. He had begun digging not in further panic but deliberately, as a matter of precaution. Long before the dog had come, and merely as a matter of instinct, the Barbarian had fortified himself against capture. The den was labyrinthine, a cross and crisscross of holes and

THE BARBARIAN

small pockets and unexpected turns. There were three outlets, numerous caches of mice killed and brought in and stored for food. In two places the hole followed roots of the stunted pine, difficult and devious. For it is in this way that the weasel protects himself; and doubtless this is one reason why he survives, for he is the object of universal hate.

When the digging without had ceased, the Barbarian stopped his work. He was panting from the exertion and from the furious struggle with the dog. His flanks vibrated with his breath, so he lay down and rested for half an hour, then stuck his head from the opening above the tree and peered about, making no noise.

He returned to the den. In the pocket of one of the holes were five mice, neatly laid side by side. Greedily the Barbarian seized one of these and scuttled to a wider cavity farther down. He ate it ravenously, leaving in the end only a bit of fur and the clean-picked bones. These he shoved with his nose over to a small heap of similar refuse to one side.

What with the snowbird and the mouse and the other mice yet remaining, he might

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have rested. But he hungered not so much to eat as to kill. He liked to kill. He relished the taste of fresh blood, enjoyed the quivering of his kill under his teeth.

Swiftly emerging from his den, he happened unexpectedly on a pine squirrel. He made for it at once, leaping like the mink whose cousin he is. The squirrel nimbly ran the fence at first, his small tail streaming brown behind him. He had an advantage up on the fence, because there his way was unobstructed.

But the Barbarian kept close behind. Two hundred yards down the rail fence gave way to a wire one, and, reaching the spot, the little squirrel was forced to leap to the ground.

The weasel was terrifyingly near, so close that the squirrel shrilled twice in pure terror. But by a supreme effort he put distance between them, making for a lodge-pole. Up he tore, his pursuer hot on his heels. He ran to the topmost tip, then seeing the Barbarian pursuing relentlessly, ran back down three yards, and out on a limb. The light snow fell in a shower of down, bewildering the weasel.

THE BARBARIAN

But he sensed the presence of his quarry and darted out the limb. The slender branch swayed beneath the weight, and the squirrel, losing his balance, slipped and hung hugging the twig with his feet. But righting himself with a propulsive bound, he leaped to another limb to the left.

Cannily the Barbarian regained the trunk of the tree, as if to cut off any possible escape; and though the squirrel leaped from limb to limb, the weasel always faced him from the bole.

A squirrel in a neighboring tree, knowing himself safe in the maze of his vast territory, set up a shrill warning. He chattered incessantly, making the quiet hillside echo with the commotion.

But the pursued squirrel paid no heed to this, save perhaps to be frightened the more. He stopped on a limb, his pounding heart fluttering visibly. But the Barbarian put a front foot restlessly on the limb and made to start out.

The squirrel leaped, missed his footing, and fell to the ground. The weasel fairly slid down the bole, scratching the bark as he went. Three feet from the ground he

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bounded after his prey and landed dangerously close.

The squirrel was in a panic. It darted toward the meadow, the last place where a refuge might be found. An abandoned gopher hole was in a clump of grass, and the banner-tail swirled into it. But the Barbarian slipped in after him.

When he came out ten minutes later, he was licking his lips as a cat does after a particularly appetizing meal. He paused before stepping away from the tuft of grass, daintily sniffing the air. Then he sought his den, surfeited and gorged. Here he lay down on a bed of hair and feathers while licking the blood from his paws. This done, he slept.

Night called him forth. Night when the sky was overcast by coming snow, but quiet night, white with the flakes already fallen. Tree boles stood straight in black relief. Here and there about their bases, pine squirrels had left their hieroglyphs: now the tracks were in straight symmetrical lines, showing where the owners had hurried from tree to tree; or, again, they were bunched and broken, and showed in pairs.

THE BARBARIAN

For the pine squirrels love to play in the snow.

But the Barbarian did not want to play. Solitary in his habits, his disposition was too discontented and choleric to leave much room for the playful tendencies. He wanted to prowl in order to kill. To destroy was a burning lust with him; but always it was life he wanted to destroy. He liked the alarm his unexpected presence stirred up in all the forms of life on which he fed.

His very gait had in it a quick business-like purposefulness. Stopping suddenly with back arched and small head elevated, he sensed his surroundings as one with work to do and understanding as to how it should be accomplished.

He crossed the small wooden bridge over the creek and began an undulating progress toward Pine Knot Ranch. He knew of the great Airedale, but not with fear. The dog was merely something that must be taken into account and outwitted.

He skirted the bunk house and crept toward the small house with the high stone foundation where the chickens roosted. It was this impenetrable stone foundation that

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in the past had given him trouble, but he was resolved once again to try for entrance.

He smelled about the stones, standing on hind legs with forefeet on the wall, sniffing for possible crevices above him, continuing so till he reached the door.

Chance favored him at the door. Snow had blown into the doorway during the day, and when the door was closed at night this snow had balled up and now held the bottom of the door slightly open.

The Barbarian shot in instantly, his air one of vicious importance. The sleepy chickens began to cluck and move uneasily. He attacked the nearest, cutting its throat with incredible swiftness. The others were roused. Cackling, they scurried about the small room, flying against the small end windows, jumping to the roosts only to jump down again, creating wildest confusion.

But in all the confusion the Barbarian did not lose his head. He was like a collected fireman amid the hysteria of a big blaze. He lifted his head from the first kill, and with quick movements began the slaughter. His small, sinuous body lifted, and his teeth closed. With the final quiver of a prostrate

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chicken, he would turn to another. He did not even stop to suck their blood.

The door opened and a woman entered, carrying a lantern and armed with a broom. The Barbarian saw her and paused belligerently. He was furious at the interruption. When the broom descended, he dodged it. It came at him again, swung sidewise. He stepped back. It came jabbing at him then—short, quick thrusts that gave him less time to dodge. But he evaded them.

His fury mounted. He reared to his hind feet, his red eyes twin coals of fire, and charged direct. The woman jumped back with a little scream of fright—and the weasel slipped through the doorway and made for the creek. He went swiftly, remembering the Airedale. But Lion and James were with the sheep.

The Barbarian sought his den, as though willing to call it a day. Save the blood of the first chicken, he had eaten nothing of his kill. But something within him was more complacent than before, as though the wanton blood lust were allayed for the time.

He spent some five minutes going through the various rooms of his den, sniffing care-

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fully, pausing, hurrying on. In the chamber where were the dead mice he stopped, sniffing them over. But he did not eat.

Rather he sought a retreat well to the upper part of the den, where were bits of small fine twigs, tufts of fur, and feathers. The nest was soft and pleasant. He lay down and curled up. Soon the heat of his body in the small dry chamber made ample warmth. He yawned once or twice, looking up. Then he slept.

Came morning and he sallied forth, eager to know what the day held in store. The old rail fence provided him shelter, and he sought it, not so much because he feared attack as that it enabled him to slip unobserved upon any prey that might be near.

A half mile down and small tracks were in the snow, tracks whose small toes flared and which resembled those of a squirrel, but which in reality had been made by a chipmunk.

The weasel's red eyes glowed with a sort of cruel madness. His body hung motionless for a moment, while he made sure his prey was nowhere in sight. Then he darted quickly up the hill.

THE BARBARIAN

He espied the little chipmunk sitting humped up and still on the top of a stump. A tiny hole in the snow told where he had searched for food, and the minute particles of a pine nut scattered below where he now sat told what he had found. But now he was not eating. He was not even whistling. His little body was drawn together in a small red ball while he rested content.

The Barbarian made a quick but noiseless detour in order to make his approach from the rear. He reached the stump and with swift undulations ran swiftly round it. His every movement suggested swift certainty, instant attack, intent to kill.

But even he was not stealthy enough. The red ball whirled, the tiny claws bit into the rotten wood, and with a small sound of terror the ground squirrel sought his hole.

The weasel topped the stump and likewise descended. He thrust his wedge-shaped head into the little aperture and the decayed wood yielded. Little by little he forced himself on. Twice he stopped to dig where the earth was unyielding, spurred on by the hot scent of his prey.

His hind claws gave him traction in the

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dirt, and straightening his legs, the slim body was forced inch by inch into the hole. So hard was he pushing that when he reached the main room of the chipmunk's quarters he shot into it like a fury.

The ground squirrel leaped for the opening by which the Barbarian had entered, but a quick thrust sent him back. In a panic he tried to burrow beneath the peck of pine nuts which he had stored up for the winter. But the weasel's teeth sank into his neck and he was dragged back. He did not even fight, so great was his terror.

A little later the Barbarian's head was visible at the top of the stump. His forefeet rested almost on a level with his head, the hinder part of his body sloping back into the devoured chipmunk's hole.

He wanted water. Racing down the bank he slipped under the fence and made for the stream, his body a moving finger of gray-brown against the snow. He was unprotected in the open, between fence and water.

From the extreme top of a great Douglas fir, a hawk espied him. For a solid hour it had sat there motionless, its keen eye over the surrounding country.

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It dropped from its perch with scarce the flutter of a wing, swooping with accuracy unbelievable. Its talons hung low, black and hard against the snow. As it reached the Barbarian they let down, then contracted. With a mighty flapping of wings the great bird began to fly away.

But in spite of the grip of the black talons the Barbarian turned face uppermost to his captor. The sharp teeth sank into the breast at the base of the wing, while the claws scratched and tore.

The hawk wavered. Its upward flight for the moment was arrested, but only for the moment. Its claws contracted like bits of hard steel, and the Barbarian ceased to struggle. The wings flapped again triumphantly, taking their owner and its next meal up the valley.

LARK

LARK was not a big dog. He never would be, for he was to be a sheep dog, where quickness is preferable to size. But at present he was only half grown.

There are five ages in the life of a dog: puppy, pup, doggie, dog, and old dog. Lark was a doggie. He had shed his pup teeth, but his pads were still too large and his joints very prominent.

For three months he had been at the camp, brought there when a pup by Bo, the sheep-herder. Lark was following in the steps of his ancestors, sheep dogs from time out of mind.

Bred in his bone was the lore of the craft. Vaguely and sweetly familiar was the bleat of three thousand sheep; hauntingly fragrant the breath of the great forest; welcome the morning with dew thick on the grass and damp on the fleece of the sheep.

He liked the smell of the early camp; had a regular little round for the beginning of day. He would trot out to the dead camp

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fire and sniff the white ashes moist with dew, wrinkle his small nose toward the frying pan hanging on a nail on the tree, go over and sniff the leathern bags of salt packed in for the sheep. Then he would run as fast as his legs would carry him round and round the camp, ending by wriggling in and licking Bo in the face.

"Get out, you sucker!" Bo would complain, then reach down and lift Lark to the blanket and slick his ears back, making his head look like a black top.

Lark didn't like to have his ears slicked back. It drew his eyelids up and tickled his ears inside. As a protest he would put a large wet paw down on Bo's face.

"Get that foot out of my mouth!" Bo would roar, turning out of bed; which was just what Lark wanted.

While Bo was getting breakfast Lark worried the older dogs. They usually got up stiff from the previous day and heavy with sleep. But he ran in front of them and blocked them, reared up and slid off their shoulders, opened wide his mouth and tried to bite their heads. Only after a curt snap or two would he let them alone.

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They were always fed before he was, and generously too. But Bo always managed to drop a cake or two and a little bacon down between his knees. It was purely accidental. Lark invariably wormed in and gobbled it down.

"Lark! Did you eat that?" would come Bo's stern question.

At which Lark would sit down on his haunches, draw his slender pink tongue reminiscently over his lips, and wink! After an exhibition of such clear impudence Bo would tell him to be gone and never show himself again.

The first months Lark was too little to go on the daily trips. The distances were too long, and the travel too sharp for his tender pads. He rebelled at the command to stay in camp. He would remain by the dying fire till Bo was two rods distant, then bound after him, feigning forgetfulness of the stern command. But he knew when Bo was serious; and at the pointing hand would drop his tail and go forlornly back.

But he soon discovered how to put in his time. There were the pine squirrels, for one thing. He was curious about them, yet cau-

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tious. They ran about on the ground or dug small holes in the soft earth. At first he watched them from a distance, his muzzle fairly working with curiosity.

Then one day he could stand it no longer. He charged two of them, running headlong. They fled in terror, ran up a lodgepole, and set up an excited chattering. He barked at them savagely, then went over and sniffed in the holes they had been digging.

From that time on he annoyed them constantly. He stalked them; he lay motionless for a half hour at a time behind some stump, waiting for them to come near, then charged, jumping straight in the air and bounding for them.

Then there were the gophers. He hardly knew what to make of them. They dodged quickly here and there, stopping to eat the grass, or darted whistling into their holes. Whatever he might be doing this whistling arrested him.

One day he tried one out. He crawled nearer and nearer, ready to turn tail and flee if it should appear dangerous. For a time it did not notice him. He grew bolder, carefully drew himself closer. It stopped

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eating and stood up like a picket pin, waiting. He waited too.

But when it dropped on all fours and loped toward a hole he was as a cat lured by a vanishing ball. But it beat him to the hole. He dug for it, his soft pads tearing up the earth.

From that time he made regular rounds to all the gopher holes he could find. Each bore the marks of his claws. He went on these rounds eagerly, venturesomely, though he never caught a gopher.

He dug beneath rotten logs for field mice, tearing out great chunks of the soft wood with his teeth. Hardly a log around but the earth was fresh-dug beneath it. He trotted importantly back to camp after such adventures, the brown wood-dust heavy on his nose.

He could not solve the riddle of the porcupine. The first one he ever saw was down the trail near the spring. It was ambling sedately along. He leaped toward it, confidently expecting it to turn tail and flee at his presence. But it did not. He slowed down. Its small eyes were turned stupidly toward him. He stopped.

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He made a detour, the porcupine waiting patiently. He went nearer and sniffed, sticking his head far out. A twig snapped under his forefeet and he jumped back with a frightened yelp.

He never succeeded in frightening a porcupine. Many times he rushed one, barking, the hair on his back ruffed like a row of bristles, his mouth wide. But his tactics failed. He came to regard the big rodent with a vexed curiosity, but a curiosity tempered with discretion.

Came the memorable day when Bo put a wee stray lamb in the little corral and told Joe to stay and watch it that day. Joe was the oldest of the four dogs; and the real reason he was left in camp was that his feet were sore, worn to the raw by hard travel over the sharp hills.

But the ruse dulled his disappointment at being left behind. He stalked majestically out and lay down beside the little corral. Lark observed this. Then he drew himself up stiffly and likewise stalked out and lay down.

For an hour or so they lay in the sun. Morning had scattered the fog, and the vast

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bare knobs rimmed by the forests stretched on and on and on.

Joe lifted his head and sniffed inquiringly. Then with a low growl he arose and took a few steps up the hill.

Sharply silhouetted on the peaks was a coyote, large almost as Joe. At first it stood sniffing the air, one forefoot lifted. But it sighted the camp and scented the lamb. It took a step down.

Old Joe raised his bristles and walked stiff-legged toward it, emitting a deep penetrating growl. In imitation Lark likewise lifted his bristles and drew back his lips in what he meant to be a very terrifying snarl.

The coyote stopped. Joe also halted. For near a minute he stood perfectly still, eying this formidable foe. He dropped to his belly.

Lark lay down, striving to look ferocious. His head on his paws he turned his eyes first toward Joe, then at the coyote. At the latter he growled fiercely.

For an hour the little game continued: a tentative step or two down the hill on the part of the wolf, Joe's growling belligerency, a halt; then a repetition of the process.

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Ever a coward, the coyote shunned a fight, yet the dripping tongue told of its hunger.

But at last its patience gave way. It sat on its haunches and whined, sniffing the wind, got up and paced the peak laterally, and took a last tentative step downward. At which old Joe rose again and stood with head lowered in defiant watchfulness. With a fling of the head in mockery and disgust the coyote whirled about and trotted over the peak and away.

Lark waited a discreet interval before he arose and trotted up the hill. He sniffed curiously at the tracks of the coyote, feeling as he did so a queer thrill of fear. For though this was his ancient kin, he likewise sensed that it was his foe.

He felt cowed all the remainder of the day. He made the rounds of the gopher holes, surprised a fat old fellow too far afield and came near catching him before he scuttled in. But the strange new fear hung over him and robbed the sport of its old zest.

He was glad when Bo came home. Gladder still after supper to snuggle down between his knees, even though his ears were

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slicked back. And to break his own loneliness Bo told him many things.

Lark went to sleep.

By morning Joe's feet were rested, and he was to go with the flock. There was the patter of innumerable feet; the vast and restless bleating that abated not but was like the murmur of the sea.

The lamb was still in the corral. "You stay here, Lark," Bo said. "Guard the lamb, see?" He pointed.

Lark saw. The new responsibility made him less forlorn at being left behind. He trotted importantly over to the corral and lay down, but not for long.

A porcupine waddled up to the tent and began to gnaw the handle of the broom. Lark went swiftly over to drive it away. He jumped up and down and barked, bit at a stick and tossed it in the air, ran perilously near the flaring quills, but without effect. He finally withdrew to a safe distance to watch. The porcupine eyed him stupidly for a minute, then waddled slowly down the trail toward the spring.

A camp-robber, flitting stupidly from limb to limb, approached ever nearer the

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camp. The bird always interested Lark. It was tame. He felt each time he would be able to catch it before it could fly away. He went after it now, slipping up on it and leaping quickly. But it flew just in time. He chased it about over the hill, barking.

So morning passed and afternoon waned. Lark got up from a nap and putting out his forelegs stretched himself, opening his mouth and sticking out his tongue in a long luxurious yawn. He started toward the spring.

Rounding the tent he almost ran into the coyote. It had been slowly crawling nearer under cover of the tent. Lark's sudden appearance frightened it, but it startled Lark much more.

He dropped his tail and scuttled for the tent. Jumping on the bunk he made himself as small as possible. But almost at once he was off again and at the flap, peering cautiously out. The coyote was detouring to come up on the other side of the little corral.

Lark's tail curved clear under against his belly. He was so scared that he drew his little body down close to the ground. But

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with a high shrill growl he ran for the corral. The lamb was there.

He barked fiercely, a bark that ended in a nervous whine; ran thrice around the pen; then opening his jaws to make them as ferocious as possible, he made for the coyote. And this animal, ever a coward at heart, gave uncertain ground, retreating up toward the peak.

Shivering, Lark took up a position half way between it and the lamb. A tremor ran through his flanks. He kept up a whining half-bark.

For ten minutes the coyote sat motionless on its haunches. It glanced at the sun, at Lark, at the corral; grew impatient and expressed it by a long inquiring whine. Lowering its head it started to crawl down the hill. The pup saw the advance and sprang up, darting back and to in an effort to frighten it away.

But the coyote kept on.

Lark gave ground desperately, still bounding about in his contortions. He snapped the sod, barked furiously; but he shook with sheer terror. He felt the corral behind him and instinctively ran behind it.

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But his head reappeared, peering forlornly round a post.

He was so weak he could scarcely stand. Coming from behind the post he allowed his hind quarters to lean against it and began a bark that ended in a howl—a howl of fear and supplication, his upper lip dropping and making a funnel of his mouth. Then he looked despairingly up the hill to see what might happen.

The coyote was not to be easily frightened. It partly understood the pup's terror and was emboldened by it. Noiselessly it advanced one foot after the other, sliding forward on its belly. A pine squirrel in a near-by lodgepole let out such a "Chick-chick-r-r-r-r-r!" that the coyote bounded into the air and loped up the hill. But it stopped abruptly and started back.

Lark likewise was terrified by the sound. It but increased his panic. But at sight of the coyote bounding away he took after it, barking shrilly.

But he backed down the hill again, giving ground till he felt the poles of the pen behind him, and give further he could not. Something within him shrank and quailed;

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but something within him said that the lamb was his trust and that the beloved form that played with him and slicked back his ears would expect to find the lamb there when he returned.

His courage was gone utterly. His backbone was but a strip of soft bacon. His spirit groveled in abject fear. The poles but served to support his wavering hind quarters.

But he was a sheep dog. He did not know whence the knowledge came, but he understood that such a dog never hurts the sheep; that he must always stand between his charge and danger.

He howled again, the funny funnel of his mouth a black circle of entreaty. And then he faced the coyote squarely. He was less than half its size; its jaws might easily crush his soft bones.

It was very close now. Lark knew that unless he did something it would soon be past his guard. He looked at the lamb. It stamped ludicrously about the corral, shivering its little white tail. For a moment Lark hated it; felt an impulse to turn and flee ignominiously, running, running, run-

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ning, in the direction Bo had taken. But he could not do it.

Instead he turned. His ears were laid back, and while his tail still curved between his legs, in his eyes was a look of desperate resolve. He charged—straight at the stealthily crawling form and directly against the gray body. He buried his small teeth in something soft and hot and closed his eyes.

The coyote was surprised. It snapped viciously, twice. The first missed, but the second gashed the pup's shoulder cruelly. But the small teeth held.

The taste of blood sickened Lark. He feared to let go the hold he had, knowing that he might never get another. He had the coyote by the neck just in front of the right shoulder; not at all a deadly hold. But it was protection to his own throat and head: he was too close to the coyote's mouth for it to do serious injury to his own head.

But at the tenacity of the hold the coyote's fury increased. It shook viciously, swinging the lighter body in air; then flung it to the ground and pounced upon it with forefeet, snapping savagely at back and flanks.

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Each closing of jaws filled Lark with sharp exquisite pain. He felt his body tortured as if it were being disemboweled. He wanted to let loose and drag himself away. But he heard the nervous bleat of the frightened lamb, and tightened his hold.

He knew then that he should die, and a shudder like a sob passed over him. He felt himself being dragged to the corral; and with a new horror sensed that in spite of his death the lamb should be killed. He whimpered an entreaty meant for Bo. He opened his jaws and caught deeper, then forgot everything save that he must hold on.

A single loud report crashed through the vast silence and reverberated from peak to peak. The wolf's body fell limp; and releasing his hold, Lark looked up in bewilderment.

Bo was coming up the draw toward him. The little fellow laid back his ears and went dragging toward his master, making small sounds of abject joy. He was pathetically glad to see him. He was shaking with fright and covered with blood, but relief made him well-nigh delirious.

He wagged his body from side to side,

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licked out his tongue, and finally fell abjectly to his belly and crawled to meet his master. He licked the outstretched hand and rolled over on his back in pure joy.

"So you fought a coyote, eh, little doggie?" Bo greeted him. He picked the shaking body up in his arms and carried it in his arms to the tent. He deposited it on the bunk, only to have Lark look up with a question.

"Sure you can stay on the bed, puppy. And after this you can go along with old Bo."

THE STORY OF PINK AND TOM

I PUT some wood on the camp fire and it flared redly, throwing the great trees into relief. Even the sheep camp, in the dancing light, was softened to beauty. The sheep were still. Straight above us the stars were close and white. The milky way, seen in glimpses through the trees, belted the sky with diamonds.

Bo's mood was mellow. It had been a hard day, but supper and the friendly fire had restored him. He was leaning back against a stake, Lark's head between his knees.

"You were saying something about cats?" I prompted him.

"Wel-l-l, yes," he answered, meditatively. "A lot of people say they don't like cats. I guess it's fashionable not to. Young people especially. Ask them, and they say, 'I hate cats!'

"Youngsters are like that," Bo philosophized. "They get a lot of their hates second-hand. They hate something because

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somebody has said it's the proper thing. I used to hate the Democrats because my dad was a Republican." He grinned quietly.

"Then you don't hate cats? Why not?"

"Well, sir, I will tell you the story of Pink and Tom. Maybe that will answer you."

He settled himself more comfortably against the stake, and looked long into the fire. When he spoke again, his voice was mellow and reflective, as one who looks back into the past at something tender.

A stray cat had found his camp one spring, and he had called her Rastus because she was so black. Coal-black all over was she, save for white front feet and long white whiskers. Her eyes were yellow.

He gave her home quite gladly. She kept the rodents away, was clean and no trouble, and was very nice to have around. More than once when Bo was fretful or worried, sight of the cat curled up in a bit of grass, contented and at peace, quieted him down.

Then, less than three weeks after her arrival, she was not alone. Four kittens had come in the night, and Bo poked them with

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a curious finger when he returned from the sheep. Rastus allowed him to do so, but purred her pleading for him to be careful.

He was careful, but his curiosity grew with the small bodies. At first he could hold all four kittens in one hand. They would lie on his palm, stretched out beside each other like four small bananas.

One noon Bo had them in his lap looking at them, when the fire needed replenishing. He put them on the ground while he laid some chunks on the blaze. When he would have returned to them, but one was there. He espied Rastus, her eyes wide with fear, carrying one to the box where they had been born.

He stopped to watch her. She dropped the kitten in the box, gave its tiny body a stroke with her tongue, then hurried over for the last one. She got it by the back of the neck and lifted up. It folded its body beautifully, hind legs up and front down. Its eyes were not yet open, but its small forehead was wrinkled in perplexity.

When Rastus deposited it in the box, she smelled over the four to make sure she had them all, then came over to Bo. Purring,

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she rubbed against his legs. It was like an entreaty for him not to be cross.

It was then he began to perceive that cats might possess some sort of lively reaction to the world. "I had kind of thought them dumb and selfish," he said. "Cats usually sit around so quiet, and don't seem as quick to respond as a dog. But what did old Rastus mean, if she wasn't telling me not to get mad at her for taking her kittens back to the nest?"

He began to worry lest the old dogs happen in some time and do the kitten family harm. But what he witnessed one day laid these fears. An old dog did trot up to the box bent on quick deviltry. But a black flash leaped out and landed on his back.

It was Rastus, but such a Rastus as Bo had never seen before. All fear seemed gone from her. Her body appeared twice its normal size. She was quick and agile with such a fury as left the old dog non-plussed. He started to run, and as he ran Rastus rode him, her front claws tearing savagely.

Bo laughed till he was weak. He sat down on a log and wiped the tears from his

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eyes. While he still sat, Rastus returned, her red tongue licking her chops. Sedately she got back into her box and began to lick her kittens. The old dog returned later, but he approached cautiously, making sure he was not running into danger.

So Rastus taught the dogs their place. But to Bo she granted large privileges. He might take the kittens over to the fire, or carry them around with him. Save the once, she never took them back to the nest. At first she would follow him around when he had them, but even this she did not do for long. Only, for a long time, she was manifestly relieved when he brought them back.

The four grew too large to be carried in one hand. They required both. Their eyes opened. At first the pupils were a vague slate color, as though too cloudy to perceive objects. But in a few days they cleared, when the kittens would watch with mild curiosity all that passed about them.

To Bo they began to acquire individuality. There was Black, for instance, whose color was like his mother's; and Red, curiously streaked with bright yellow; and

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Pink, clingiest and most cuddling of all, which would lie in Bo's hand, or allow him to wool her, with no protest at all. And last of all was Tom, the biggest of the nest, a curious mixture of gray and white, pleasant-faced and friendly.

For weeks they crawled about, feebly at first, but with increasing sureness. Then they stood up and walked; very wobbly, with their legs tracking stiffly. At last they could run.

"You don't know how a feller gets interested in little things like that, all by himself up here," Bo said. "Red started to run the first one. He was over at the box, and turned this way. He jumped a little, then ran, his hind legs lifting at different times. It was funny to see him do it. I felt like it was really important."

They all could run soon after that; and then began the endless play about the camp. One would be off by himself, when another would stalk him and sprawl gleefully upon him. They climbed the little pine shoots and bent them over; climbed into the bed and explored under the covers. But after an hour or two of this, they would seek some

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soft spot and lie down in a heap, their small bodies inextricably mixed.

Then one day James appeared with the statement that a cat or more would be welcome at the ranch. "Something has happened to the ones we had there, and the mice are getting bad in the barn. Don't mind if I help myself, do you?"

"They are not hardly weaned," Bo protested.

"I thought she had started to wean them when I was here last."

"She had. But it seems to take quite some time."

"They can stand it all right. How about taking the mother and one or two of the little ones? We need the old one worst."

"I'll pick out the two I am to keep."

It was not easy, but it was not impossible. Pink should stay, that was sure. Her cuddling ways had made a place for her with Bo. And for the other he chose Tom. Tom was going to be a big cat; and Bo wanted to see just how big, with proper feeding and care, he would become.

So he was left with Pink and Tom. For a few days they were disturbed and rest-

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less. Pink especially, for she had not been entirely weaned. But with each other for company, they soon rallied and took up the endless sport of stalking each other and bending down the pine shoots.

Quite shamelessly Bo allowed them to sleep on the foot of his bed. He told himself it was wise, especially since Pink was hardly weaned. With the chill of midnight they often crept under cover, where he found them in a ball when he rose to go round the sheep.

Returning, he played with them to their huge delight. Pink was such a docile little ball that he fell to tossing her into the air. She was nervous about it at first, and when she came back down her claws bit sharply as she caught at him. But she grew to like it. She would remain in a ball till she reached the highest point and began the descent, when she would turn deftly over and drop to the security of his hands.

Tom invented his own game. One evening Bo was bending over the fire, when Tom jumped on his back. Bo straightened, and Tom sought his shoulder. There he rode; and thenceforth there he would ride

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every time he got a chance, looking with absorbed interest at everything on the ground below him.

For days after their mother had been taken away, Pink and Tom ate a balanced ration. Bread, cakes, milk, and a little meat. But it was the meat that they liked best. So gradually they ate less of everything else, and set up a mighty howling for more meat. Bo was put to it to satisfy them.

The gophers solved the problem. With his twenty-two rifle he would kill one every day, skin it, cut it into small pieces, wrap most of them up and hide them for future use, and feed the rest to the kittens. Pink was fastidious in her eating, but Tom bolted his food, growling, and hastened to get to hers. She was docile, and allowed him to have it when Bo did not interfere in her behalf.

"It was funny to watch them eat," Bo said. "Little tender-bodied fellers chewing that raw meat and growling!"

Occasionally one got a bone fastened in his mouth, and began the process of backing away and clawing at his mouth with his feet. But again it was Bo. In fact, it was always

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Bo who came to the rescue, extracting the bone with his finger.

It was this close and perpetual association that developed the affection between them. They showed a decided preference for his company. In the day time he could go away from camp without their following. But in the evening it was nearly impossible to slip away without them. They ran after him like a dog; and if he hissed them back, they darted behind something and made after him again when his back was turned. If allowed to follow, they would run on ahead, wait for him behind a bunch of grass or a stone, and rush out at him when he came opposite.

"Tom was laziest," Bo reflected. "He always got tired first, and then he run up me like I was a tree, and found his place on my shoulder. Pink wouldn't let me take her for quite a while longer. She had more endurance. But I usually got back to camp carrying them both."

But around the fire of evenings they played over him promiscuously, or lay purring in his lap. Pink would allow him to take her foot in his hand and spread her

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claws, something a cat will very rarely permit. He could ruff her tail, or rub her fur the wrong way, or swing her by her hind feet; he could open her mouth and look at her teeth, or pull her whiskers, or turn her ears wrong side out. She stood it all—from him.

Tom was bent on washing Bo. When on his lap he would lick his hand constantly, his rough little tongue scraping incessantly. Both kittens washed each other, and of mornings would emerge spotlessly clean and dainty.

"Them kittens meant a lot to me," Bo declared, softly. "Maybe you don't understand. But a sheep herder is pretty much alone."

He stopped talking, and sat for a long time looking into the fire. It needed more wood, but I did not want to stir to put it on. The picture of the two playful kittens had been too quaintly drawn. I was curious about them. For Bo did not have any kittens now. What had happened to Pink and Tom?

"That was the time I had to leave camp for three weeks," he went on, as if answer-

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ing my unasked question, "to go down the valley and arrange for a place to feed the sheep during the winter."

He had left the camp in charge of an itinerant herder named Henry. Pink and Tom had wanted to follow him as he went down the trail toward the valley. They would not be driven back, so Henry had put them in a box till Bo was gone.

It was three weeks before he returned. When he reached camp, Pink came running to meet him. She sniffed him questioningly for an instant, then set up a purring of welcome. The purr became almost a whistle. She licked his hand, lay down on the ground and rolled over for his amusement. And to lie down and roll over for you, is the greatest tribute of affection a cat can give.

But Tom did not appear. Henry was out with the sheep, but as soon as he returned Bo asked about Tom. Henry said he was gone.

"He howled around for days after you left," Henry declared. "I give him meat, just as you said. He eat it for a while, but all he did was set around and meow."

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"But what became of him?

"I was comin' to that. One day he wouldn't eat. Didn't act sick, only like he didn't want anything. The next thing I knowed, he was gone."

And that was all. For a couple of days Bo looked everywhere for him. He thought he might have wandered away and become lost; but though the care of the sheep took Bo for miles in every direction, no Tom was found.

Pink was acting strangely. She would eat her meat, wander nervously about for a half hour or so, then disappear. Sometimes she would return in an hour; twice she remained away from camp all night. She looked peaked and worn. She made a few lamentable attempts to play alone, but always gave it up, and then stopped and whined.

Bo decided she knew where Tom was. He made up his mind to follow her the next time she disappeared, to see where she might lead him. But this was not so easy. She evaded him cleverly, and went off alone.

But finally he was successful. She went

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off down a *coulée* and he followed her. She walked briskly, not as if stalking, but as one making straight for a definite objective. Bo followed at a distance, and carefully, afraid lest she turn back should she discover that she was being followed.

She hopped over a rotting log and did not reappear. Quietly Bo tiptoed to the end of the log whence he could look out its length to see what was there.

Pink was lying on her side, but with her head thrown back, as a cat will lie when it wants to catch your attention with its playfulness. Her paw darted out and tapped something lightly, as if inviting a frolic.

Bo came nearer. Pink abandoned her playful attitude and settled down beside something. She looked up when Bo stood over her, but she did not offer to play. She was cuddled up against Tom, and he was dead.

"I've thought about that a lot," Bo concluded. He got up and looked at the stars. "Way I figure it out, Tom just naturally died because I went away. And little Pink—she kept going to him, trying to get him to play with her."

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"And Pink?" I asked.

"Well, sir, I kind of thought she might like it better down to the ranch, where she would have company."

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THE sheep camp at twilight. High up on the mountain, for sheep seek the heights to sleep. The sun had rolled behind a crag a hundred miles away, and the great tree boles no longer cast shadows. Slowly they were being enfolded by a dusk like an odorless smoke.

The bleating of sheep. Thousands of sheep settling for the night. Now here, now there, the mellow vibrant bleat rippled over the mountainside—contented bleating. Yet as it rose from this place and that, it gave a sense of distributed vastness to the herd, outlining its boundaries without the need of sight.

Darkness gathered.

At the herder's tent was Bo. Supper was over. The old dogs, tired but fed, had sought soft places to sleep. But Lark, newest of all, was between Bo's knees, licking his hands and begging attention. Bo pulled the soft ears and stroked the head, but knew it not.

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His eyes were on the whitening coals of the fire. His thoughts were—who knows where? Perhaps far away in a little town of a warm, quiet valley, where a full-throated girl had once been wont to run to meet him. But that was long ago, before the vast West knew him. Was she there yet, and would he find her waiting if—?

A nervous leaping on the outskirts of the flock, quick feet beating hard earth, terrified bleating. Bo sprang to his feet. The old dogs rose stiffly, growling. "Down!" Bo ordered, then listened.

Fright affected the whole flock, running like a shiver through it. But down in the *coulée* to the right it was worst. Panic was there. Bo seized his great rifle, and with a gesture to the dogs to stay back, slipped hurriedly down.

Sheep bolted at his approach. The whole flock was shifting round the slope. The tumult of their going covered the approach of Bo. He neared the spot of the first disturbance.

Something was there. He heard a scratching, an impact as though from a plunge, and then the sound of sucking. He

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realized what it was, and involuntarily the hair shivered on the back of his neck.

It was the mountain lion, called by some the cougar and by others the puma. In the East, before its extinction, it was the panther or the catamount. But around the sheep camps it is the lion, and it is the deadly foe of the herder.

The mountain lion varies in length from five to eight feet. Its body is slender and round. Its tail is excessively long, often dragging the ground behind it when it walks. In color it is fox brown. Its little ears are like the ears of a cat, but its head is round, with a peculiar hint of the vicious and the predatory.

It was this cougar that had attacked Bo's sheep, and he was apprehensive of the result, for the animal often kills wantonly, bearing down from three to eight, sucking a little blood and moving on to further destruction.

Darkness was not impenetrable, though nearly so. There were outlines, seen principally because they moved. Again the sound of sucking and the tearing of claws through flesh.

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Bo raised his rifle and fired—four times. Silence. Yet he did not know whether he had hit his mark. But it was all he could do. It was too dangerous to go to investigate. A crippled cougar stumbled on in the dark. . . . Only morning could tell him anything.

It was hours before he went to bed. With the dogs he tried to circle the frightened sheep, picking his way precariously over the boulder-strewn mountain. The sheep trembled at his approach, yet were clearly assured at his presence.

He did all he could. Come daylight, and he would make sure no little bands had become separated from the main flock. At the farthest distance from camp he fired his rifle again, to frighten away any lurking enemy; then calling the dogs, went back to his camp.

The next morning Bo went down the *coulée*. He could see the dead sheep ahead of him. But not till he was on the spot did he see the lion. One of his chance shots had taken effect, in the back of the neck.

"I got him!" Bo cried. "Who ever would have thought it!"

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The lion was now stiff, the dew standing on the tips of ragged hairs. The naturally black lips were red with blood. The mouth was also festered with porcupine quills, for the cougar kills many porcupines.

Bo turned the body over, examining it with interest. Then, "Well, I'll be dog-goned!" he exclaimed. "She had little ones!"

The teats of the cougar were slender and long, a hairless circle two inches or more in diameter about each of them. Bo appeared distressed.

"I'm glad I killed the old glutton," he pondered. "But I hate to think of those little ones starving to death." He squatted beside the body. "Maybe they were almost weaned!" he finally said with hope, then grinned.

"I ought to hope they will die, Lark," he said to the pup that crept up beside him hoping not to be driven away. "But you hate to want any little thing to starve to death. What if it was you?"

Bo cut out some meat from one of the sheep as feed for his dogs, then buried the three that had been killed, and the cougar

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with them, down in the *coulée*, covering the bodies with rocks. He then went about the day's work.

He could not be sure that any sheep had been lost from the main flock in the panic of the night. But for three days thereafter he made wide circles in unfrequented places, to make certain.

It was the third day. With the main flock feeding behind him, he had made a long trip down the ridge. He had circled a huge cliff, and was taking a vague trail back to camp. Suddenly he heard a sound. His woods-trained ears could not place it. This perplexed him, for he thought himself familiar with every sound of the hills.

It came from the cliff above. Giant rocks were there, marking the end of the ridge; rocks that stuck up nakedly, black with ages of weathering. Carefully he climbed up, sharp in his watch for rattle snakes.

The sounds became more distinct. "Sounds like a kitten," Bo declared at last. Then he saw them—two little cougar kittens, clearly in distress. They were thin and unsteady, with the emaciated, mangy look a kitten so soon acquires when it is deserted.

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They were climbing up on a bowlder, trembling, then falling off. Their cries usually came when they were climbing up.

"Well I'll be doggoned!" Bo exclaimed in sympathy.

Lark came tearing up, bristling and growling. He seized one of the kittens in his mouth and stabbed it down on the ground. This made up Bo's mind for him.

"Here, you drop that and git!"

Lark obeyed, but looked crestfallen.

"Still, though," Bo pondered, "I guess that's the best thing. Kill them and get them out of the way."

Lark sensed the indecision of his master's mood, and looked hopeful. But the shaking kitten whimpered over to Bo and started to climb up his trousers leg.

He stooped and picked it up. Its little claws were sharp, and it clung to his hand in terror. The slight body was covered with black spots and vague stripes, and the small tail was ringed. The mother had had neither spots nor rings. But Bo understood. Just as the fawn is covered with white spots when it is young, but later loses them; so the mountain lion's kittens are spotted black

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and have ringed tails, but all these markings are later lost, leaving a uniform color, save for a whiteness about the corners of the mouth.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," Bo temporized, talking aloud as the sheep herder often does. "I'll take them to camp and give them one big feed, then kill them. I hate to have the little things die so hungry. They look too peaked."

So that day, during the heat of noon when sheep usually seek the shade to lie down, and when their herder often sleeps, Bo spent the hours rigging up a contrivance for feeding his cougar kittens. A bottle was not hard to find, and condensed milk he had in plenty. But to get the milk from the bottle to the hungry mouths was not so easy a matter. He had an old canvas glove which he sometimes wore of mornings when his rifle was cold to the hand, and from this glove he cut the little finger. He tied it over the neck of the bottle, and turned the bottle up side down. The milk ran down into the canvas finger, and oozed through in large drops. He offered the improvised teat to one of the kittens.

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The hungry little lips closed over it greedily, but it flattened out and was soon sucked dry. And as long as the lips continued to suck, the milk remained back in the bottle. Bo scratched his head.

"It needs something to hold it out," he decided. Again he scratched his head, looking around at the scanty furnishings of the camp. But he was inventive. He discovered a little piece of hemp cord; and taking the glove finger from the bottle, he stuffed a bit of the cord into it and put it back.

It worked. The eager little lips could now suck the milk down, without flattening the teat out so that the liquid could not percolate down into it. When both kittens were full, Bo took them into the tent and put them on his bed.

"I'll not kill them just yet," he said. "Better let them sleep awhile and enjoy themselves."

The old dogs would have none of this new company. Bo caught them eying him from safe distances, their looks threatening. So when it was time for him again to go around the sheep, he decided not to leave

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the kittens exposed. He got a box the camp tender had brought something out in, made a comfortable bed in it of some dry bunch grass, and put the kittens in, tacking three slats over the top.

He thought about the little cougars most of his ten-mile trip. They broke the monotony of his mind. He was grateful. When he returned to camp his first act was to go to the box to see how they had fared. They were livelier than before, and shrank from him. A small claw shot up toward the finger he poked between the cleats.

This amused Bo. He decided he would not kill them at all but would keep them, to see how they should turn out. So he fed them again and for an hour or so played with them beside the camp fire.

The old dogs held aloof, then walked stiffly away to sleep. Lark was both curious and jealous. But when he saw that his master was determined to have the kittens about him, he relented, provided he might retain his favorite position between Bo's knees.

A few days later Lark played with them

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tolerantly, as a big dog plays with a pup; two weeks later, he had succumbed, and was playing as one of them; rolling, running, frisking. They were proving as great a boon to him as they had to Bo.

Bo nailed the box up against a great yellow pine, placing it about the height of his head. Then he undertook to teach the kittens to climb up and into it. It was not easy. The mountain lion is not by nature a climber. The old accounts of panthers climbing trees and leaping down on their prey, are doubtless exaggerated. Normally they climb only to escape a feared enemy. In this they are like the house cat.

But they can climb, and in time Bo's patience was rewarded. The little felines would climb the trunk and drop down into the box, thrusting their heads out instantly to survey the world below. Soon they were sleeping in the box on the tree, and when not sleeping would sit propped up against the side, their heads only visible. This was their lookout; and as a cat will seek the vantage of a porch railing so they sought the box.

The sheep camp became their home.

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Most of the day they slept. They were nocturnal, and as evening came on they grew restless and sportive. They played together, running round and round the camp, jumping against the boles of trees and leaping down again, cluttering in a pile of old cans down near the spring, becoming suddenly frightened and running furiously for their tree.

One was a little more spiteful than the other. He was quicker of temper and inclined to spat often. Bo called him Spitfire. The other he named Bump.

One evening before Bo had reached camp an old sheep dog crept quietly nearer and nearer, his cold eyes expressive of grim determination. Perhaps he had not forgotten that the kittens had been given the liver and neck of the grouse the day before, and when he had made for them to take it away Bo had called him sharply back.

With slow cunning he came between the tree and Spitfire. Bump was exploring the pile of cans over the bank. Then the dog growled, low and unpleasantly. Spitfire whirled in instant alarm toward his protecting tree, but found escape cut off.



THE MOUNTAIN LION KITTENS MADE SPORT OF
CLIMBING THE TREES

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The cougar has been called a coward. He may be. He slinks, and he seldom attacks man. But it may be, on the contrary, that he has no fear; that he does not attack man because he does not want to.

But Spitfire's alarm was genuine. He ran, and the dog pursued. He was overtaken, but not before he had made a circle that brought him near his protecting tree. The dog instantly bowled him over with his snout, and was preparing to do speedy execution.

But unexpectedly Bump leaped from the trunk of the tree and landed on the dog's back. Her little claws dug cruelly in his neck. He forgot Spitfire, who scampered madly for the tree, and as the dog dropped to his side to get at Bump, her small body used his as a leverage and she sprang back again to the safety of the tree.

This was one of the cougar's first lessons in caution. Another came the next day. A porcupine lumbered into camp and began to hunt stolidly for something to eat. His persistent gnawing at a pine stick aroused the lions—Bump especially.

She slid noiselessly down the trunk and

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began to stalk this new and curious sight. Imperceptibly she drew nearer, her eyes wide and her whiskers a-tremble. The porcupine saw her, but gave no heed. The bark was clearly to his liking.

When she had crept to within a couple of yards of him, Bump made two mighty springs. Mighty for her: that is, the full-grown cougar has been known to leap sixty feet. For one of them to cover thirty feet is not at all uncommon.

Bump's purpose evidently was to terrify, for she drew up with a great clatter, very close to the porcupine. His coating of quills ruffled slightly, and some of the sharp pins entered her nose. She sprang back with a cry of fright and pain. Putting up her front paw, she brushed at her snout, but to no avail. She lay whimpering and crying till the arrival of Bo.

"So you got it, eh?" he asked, not unsympathetically. "Guess you will know not to tamper with Mr. Porcupine again."

Over on the opposite side of camp from the pile of cans was a gopher hole. Dry sand was piled high. It was delightfully soft, and when jumped upon, would yield a

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satisfying amount of dust. It was the favorite play of the cougars to stalk this mound of dirt.

They would crawl toward it with such patience that they seemed not to move at all. For as much as five minutes at a time they would crouch absolutely motionless; only to put out a foot and creep forward another two or three inches. Then as a grand finale they would rush it, pouncing upon it in glee, driving their front paws into the yielding earth.

One morning they were attracted by the whistle of the gopher which occupied the hole. It was sitting erect, its small body a shaft of gray. With each sharp "Pit!" the head jerked slightly.

Here was something real. Both Bump and Spitfire felt an urge that was unlearned and instinctive. All their previous play had but prepared them for this moment. When the gopher settled down to sun itself on the mound of earth, they began to stalk it. It was like play, only now was a sense of something real.

Closer and closer they crept. Not a sound betrayed their movements. The reality did

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not make them hurry. They manifested no nervous eagerness, such as would have betrayed a dog. Only their eyes were very round and serious. They sprang simultaneously, quick and cruel as the swoop of a hawk.

The gopher shrilled and fought. But the small claws rent him and the sharp teeth tore. The two lions growled at each other when the quarry was dead. But they made some kind of division, for they both ate their fill.

After that they played at hunting less, and did more of the real thing. The young grouse were just coming on, and one day Bump was attracted by a scratching down below the spring. She was a more skillful hunter than Spitfire, for among cougars, as with cats and dogs, the female is cleverer, quicker to learn, more able to profit from experience.

Nature had been kind to Bump by making her look so much like the natural background of the country. Thus, as she crept toward the sound of the scratching, the gray-brown of her body resembled the earth, and the blacker spots of her markings broke up

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the solid color into a resemblance of the spotted background.

A young grouse, fat and flaccid, was pecking aimlessly about among the pine needles and twigs. The cougar had never stalked a grouse before, nor seen it done. But she understood perfectly that the least noise would give alarm, that too hasty a spring would give too great time for escape, that too hurried approach would betray her presence. She moved just far enough at a time, and remained motionless after each move just long enough to give the impression of belonging to the stationary world, for in the woods it is movement that attracts.

She did it beautifully; and when she leaped her forepaws were not definitely directed, but were poised ready to strike in whatever direction the movement of the quarry demanded. The claws flared wickedly, unsheathed and hooked. It was a perfect catch, and her teeth sank unhesitatingly in the back of the head. When she ate, it was from the head down, and deliberately. She did not bolt, as a dog eats, nor hurry as if famished. She ate fastidiously

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and nicely, as though she had been well trained in the art.

The loss of their mother had hastened the maturity of the two lions. Normally, they are weaned at about three months of age, and do not reach maturity till nearly two years old. For this entire time they are partly dependent on their mother; they follow her about, and she hunts for them and protects them. The cowardice of the cougar is not borne out by the behavior of the mother with young. She may even attack a bear in their defense.

But necessity may bring on maturity. Two guinea pigs were taken unweaned from their mother. For the first two days they protested constantly, but would take no food. Bits of sliced raw potato were offered them, but they did not seem to know what it was for. But on the third day they ate of the potato ravenously; and thenceforth adopted the habits of adults. Their growth was stunted: when full-grown they were little more than half the normal size. Thus nature seems to maintain a law of balance—early maturity in one direction is taken off in another.

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Thus Spitfire and Bump, thrown into life prematurely, early took up the habits of age and maturity. They stalked the mice in the fields, the grouse in the thickets, the gophers about their earthen homes. Nor was there evidence of inexperience in their work—no clumsiness, but expertness and finish.

Such was Spitfire's encounter with a giant rattler. It was on a warm afternoon and he was hunting aimlessly among the rocks on the southern side of the mountain. It was a game of Spitfire's to thrust a paw under a stone, wriggle it about for an instant, and then leap on the stone to see whether anything should come out. He had once chased out a mouse in this way.

But to-day as he sprang onto the boulder, a quick, dry rattle answered him from above. He sprang back, with a revulsion ages old or a caution born of the experience of his kind. But not far. He stopped when safely out of reach.

The big rattler had been warming himself in the afternoon sun, but the coming of the kitten disturbed and alarmed him. He tightened his coils as though to make ready. His head lifted imperiously, and the black

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tongue licked out with deadly threat. Again the dry rattle.

But Spitfire did not flee. Only a slight ruffling of the hair of his back, as though it were blown by a wayward breeze. That, and a widening of his eyes. They grew round with alertness.

One foot he put forward, then the other. He was a couple of inches nearer the snake. Again the darting of the black tongue, and a slow and threatening movement of the head. The neck back of the head grew thin and hard. But Spitfire moved nearer by two more inches.

Suddenly he lifted, thrust his body forward. The big snake, to meet the attack, loosed his coils and extended himself toward his enemy. But the enemy wasn't there. The snake's fangs encountered the empty air, and it fell fully extended, to the ground.

Spitfire hadn't leaped forward. He had simply made as if he were going to. Instead, with incredible alacrity, he had swerved and sprung to one side, and when the reptile was lying defenseless on the ground, the cougar was above, then back of him. Before the sinuous body could be recoiled, Spit-

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fire's sharp teeth were in the back of the rattler's neck, pinning it down.

It was a trick of the cougar family. Spitfire had not learned it; it was part of his innate knowledge, and was ready to hand with the appearance of the snake. The big body beat about him convulsively, but he did not shrink; he merely held on, sinking his teeth deeper and deeper, till at last the lashings ceased.

When Spitfire at last looked up, Bump was on a boulder not far away, regarding him from smoldering inscrutable eyes. It was as if she had seen all and understood all, but had not interfered.

It was when the two pumas outgrew their box on the tree that Bo was forced to consider them as a problem. They were friendly and playful, but they were undeniably growing up. They might, some time, venture to attack a sheep. He had heard also that a tame lion might be dangerous to its captor, turning on him in a moment of blood-lust or anger, and rending him. Neither Spitfire nor Bump had shown any such tendency. But they did not realize their growing strength and roughness.

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Many times, in a spirit of pure fun, they had scratched Bo's hands cruelly. This was part of the story he had heard: that a tame lion draws blood from its human captor, and suddenly realizes that he is like all other prey, alive and there to be eaten.

Nor had the old dogs ever given consent to the lions' presence. They endured them because they had to. But their smoldering hostility was implacable. Sooner or later a fight was in prospect. The dogs might win, but Bo did not relish even this thought. He had a queer affection for the cougars. On the other hand, the dogs might not win. There was something cruel and lightning-like in the attack of the lions. And should they win—well, a good sheep dog was a good sheep dog, hard to get and priceless when trained.

James brought on the crisis. He had arrived from the ranch with more supplies for the camp. He had neither affection for the cougars nor sympathy with keeping them. "What do you mean to do with them, Bo?" he asked, quietly, but something significant was back of the quiet.

"I don't just know, quite."

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"They will be leaving you any time now."

"They might." But Bo's voice indicated his doubt.

"And you will have trained up a couple of nice strong lions to destroy our sheep," James continued, relentlessly.

Bo saw the logic of this. "But what can I do with them?" he asked, worriedly.

"What do you usually do with a lion when you find one?"

Bo looked toward the box on the tree. Spitfire's head was visible, and his unblinking eyes were regarding the two men solemnly. He had crowded Bump from the look-out, and appropriated it to his use alone. He had been sleeping, but had evidently been aroused from his nap by the sound of voices. Also, both lions were suspicious of James.

"What do you usually do with a lion when you find one about the camp?" James asked again.

Bo scratched his head, and glanced at his rifle. "Usually shoot them," he answered, shortly.

Spitfire's nose was wrinkling in a solemn effort to get the exact scent of James. Bo

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saw it, and quickly suppressed an impulse to grin. James turned in the direction of Bo's glance, and himself caught the smouldering eyes fixed upon him.

"The things make me squirm," he said, crossly. "You had better shoot them and get them out of the way."

"I reckon I had," Bo conceded.

When James had gone, Bo picked up his rifle and stepped off thirty paces from the box on the tree. Spitfire's head was still visible—an excellent target. Bo dropped to one knee and rested his left elbow on the other. He sighted over the barrel of his rifle before letting off the safety. The head was motionless, the distance ideal. He could not miss.

Something struck him from behind and he whirled to face Bump. She had come from her hiding place and had spatted him with a folded paw. He sat down and wooled her between his knees. Then he got up, shouldered his rifle, and went round the sheep.

It was a week before James returned. "Have you done it?" he asked, showing that the problem had been much on his mind.



YOUNG LIONS BOUND FOR SHIPMENT

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Bo shook his head shame-facedly. James did not seem surprised.

"I was talking about it down at the house," he went on. "It seems that down in Yosemite Park they have a big place where they keep live lions."

"Cages, eh?" Bo asked with hostility in his voice.

"No. A big place wired in, with a shelter and trees in it. The lions live practically in the natural state. We might send these down there."

Bo's relief was genuine. "We might, at that. Could you take them in and ship them?"

James nodded. "I guess so."

When James left an hour or so later, Honeysuckle, the little burro, carried a strange pack. The three horses had been eliminated as possible carriers of the burden, lest they become nervous and bolt. But Honeysuckle was stolid and indifferent. So on either side of the pack was a small cougar, legs bound with soft cord, both on their way to the Park.

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THE giant grizzly bear sat back on his haunches. Far above the timber line, seven thousand feet above the sea and three thousand from the green valley below, he had hollowd with his mighty forepaws a niche from the mountain, making a table six feet square. This was his summer rendezvous, whither he repaired at night and the heat of the day.

Here he was sitting now, watching the gathering light. His eyes swept the dropping mountain, rested on the tops of distant pines, and traveled the far valley beyond. He was motionless, as a dreamer might sit watching the miracle of morning. Only occasionally he moved, and then merely to swing his massive head from side to side.

In every direction stretched the forest: to the east the Great Divide of the mighty Rockies, here pine-clad and green, there bald and grisly and bare; to the west the ranking Bitter Roots, dropping away to the horizon.

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It was a country of clean-boled yellow pines that were stalwarts when Western civilization was young; of mighty fir lifting in majestic sweep to catch the upper air. And over all towered Gallogly Peak, green for half its height, but above the timber line it rose a gigantic pile of splintered shale and brown weathered stone, the high sentinel of the forest.

Over this vast and solemn realm the great grizzly bear, called by man the *Ursus horribilis*, held undisputed sway. From his high crag he now surveyed his territory as king of old might have looked out over the stretches of his empire.

He arose to allfours, stood thus for a brief instant, and started diagonally down the mountain. His gait was shuffling and awkward, yet he advanced his feet with a suggestion of intense alertness and prodigious power. Master of the forest though he was, he nevertheless kept constant guard.

His approach was signal to the denizens of the forest to beware. A black bear, feeding on huckleberries down among the lodgepole pines, lifted her head and sniffed the air. Then silently she drifted away.

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A coyote was loping straight around the mountain but caught himself suddenly, his nose wrinkling in a deep inhalation. Nothing more was necessary. He changed his course, doubling on his tracks for fifty yards, then slinking swiftly south.

Ursus the Terrible was astir.

He stopped by a lodgepole pine and reared his nine hundred pounds of bone and muscle against it. The big forepaws crept slowly upward till the front legs were completely extended. Then the six-inch claws pierced the thin bark of the pine and tore downward, splintering the bark to the quick.

He dropped but reared again. This time he jerked his head sidewise and drove his third incisor teeth two inches into the tree. Then by a reversal of his head he tore off a slab fifteen inches long and dropped it to the ground.

He stood for a moment with head lowered, searching the ground about him. To the right he espied an ant hill and took himself thither.

The mound was three feet in diameter, symmetrical and spongy, covered with pine

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needles. It was the home of the Vinegar ant, large, black-red, and aggressive.

The bear approached, drove a fore paw into the fungus mass and turned it out. With the dirt came a swarm of ants, bristlingly aggressive, ready for instant war upon the despoiler.

The bear squatted to the ground and waited. In a moment the extended paw was covered by the ants biting viciously. Then the bear put out his tongue and began to lick them off. They clung to his tongue, their heads fairly buried in it. But he minded this not at all, but drew them into his mouth and extended the tongue for more.

The ants grew fewer till there was but normal activity on the mound. Then he inserted his paw the second time and turned it out full of dirt and ants. The second detachment was as warlike as the first, but soon shared the same fate.

He kept at it till the results no longer justified the pains, then stood up, the ludicrous expression of his face seeming to indicate that he had enjoyed the fun.

He made his way to the river and started

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slowly up. His track in the soft earth bore a strange resemblance to that made by the human foot; and for this reason has given his kind among old woodsmen the name of Moccasin Joe.

He was searching for the shooting star whose leaves are green and luscious and resemble in taste the common horse radish. He found an abundance along the bank and in the marsh places, but the flies troubled him.

He came to a depression coated by a film of brackish water where the mud gave way under his feet. He sank down and turned over on his side, wallowing in the mud luxuriously. He took evident enjoyment in this strange bath. He slid along on his belly, extended his legs and lay prone, kicked jerkily with his hind feet. He rolled almost but not clear over.

The flies that had annoyed were baffled by this new coat of mud. They swarmed about it, buzzing disappointedly. And as when he had eaten the ants, again there came over the great bear's face the expression of ludicrous enjoyment, as if he took delight in their discomfiture.

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But hunger goaded him and he struck out more energetically. A spar of pine jutted into a pool and he walked out it, standing motionless while he studied the blue depths. Fish were there and he knew it. Saliva dripped from the end of his tongue.

He lay flat on the log and waited, right front paw held in readiness to plunge in and out, sending the fish flying to the bank. But he watched in vain.

Concealment is the trout's protection: the Indians used to determine whether the one they pursued had crossed a river by the simple method of slipping to the bank and seeing whether the trout were hidden. If so, they knew their quarry had passed that way.

Some such knowledge of their nature seemed to be a part of the great bear's lore, for he soon rose, shook himself disgustedly, and started the ascent of the mountain.

He sniffed at the hole of a pocket gopher, discovered that the owner was at home, and began the serious work of digging him out. The earth gave quite readily to the enormous claws, but the little animal had gone deep and far.

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At the end of half an hour the grizzly bear had moved approximately one ton of earth. He was not discouraged as the black bear would have been. He was more like the bulldog: he finished what he started. When he finally reached the end of the hole the place resembled the old abandoned mines of forgotten prospectors on Gallogly's Peak. The little gopher that finally slid down the great throat looked scarcely big enough to replace half the energy expended in capturing him; for such is the nature of the grizzly bear.

Five miles south and east of his summer rendezvous *Ursus* found the carcass of a cow moose. He fell to and ate hungrily, his jaws slobbering red.

The bone of the exposed thigh offered marrow, a bear's delicacy; and taking it in his huge jaws he splintered it at a single crunch; his small eyes flamed with gluttony.

When he had finished, the remainder of the carcass weighed in the neighborhood of five hundred pounds. Nor did he purpose to abandon it. He got hold of it with his teeth and started to drag it up the hill. It swung back parallel with his body.

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Reaching a log he changed his method. Mounting the log and turning, he again got hold and pulled the quarter-ton weight over. The way grew precipitately steep, but there seemed no limit to his incredible strength and endurance.

For fifty rods he dragged it till he found a place to his liking. There he dug a pit and dropped the carcass into it. He covered it with dirt and small debris; then gathered logs that no two men could handle and heaped them upon it. It is the grizzly's way: he covers his cache so that no other animal can get to it.

Finally satisfied, he left the task as completed and made for his nest on the crag. His gait seemed shuffling and leisurely, yet he covered the ground rapidly.

Arrived at his rendezvous, he again squatted on his haunches and overlooked his realm. It was a scene of melancholy magnificence, warm-bathed in the summer sun.

It was ten o'clock. He had been abroad five hours. His head drooped lower and lower; finally dropped to his paws. He slept. . . .

Near two thirty of the afternoon he

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awoke, not coming slowly back to consciousness, but instantly wide awake and strangely restless.

He was a new creature. During the morning hours he had been the food-getter, leisurely, systematically and purposefully searching his range. Now he was the lover.

A soft breeze had wafted a strange odor over the hills. It hung in the forest-scented air, pervasive, alluring, irresistible. It told Ursus the Terrible that a mate was tracking the distant trail and was his for the taking.

Great is the response of lower life to this pervasive mating odor. A virgin female moth was placed in a wicker cage on an ailanthus tree, and a mile and a half away in Chicago a male, a silk string tied around its abdomen for identification, was set at liberty. The next morning the two were together. A rare cocoon hatched a female whose like had not been seen in the locality for twenty years, and within a few hours after she reached maturity sixty males had sought her out.

So now the winds of the forest brought to Ursus the Terrible the odor of a mate. He was on allfours in an instant. His feet

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braced wide apart, he sniffed the air to get the location. His head turned southeast: over where the Rockies were cut by the Bitter Roots—she was there.

The long hair that formed the roach at his shoulders stood up, the silver of the tips fading to lead nearer the skin. His head lifted till the nose pointed straight up. The heavy jaws opened and closed, twice.

The odor met him square as he circled the mountain. As he pushed forward his legs moved mainly from shoulders and hips: there was but slight bending of the knees. This very stiffness gave him an air of determination implacable.

A huge black bear, caught unawares because of the direction of the wind, bounded up a lodgepole out of the grizzly's way. He found safety there, for the grizzly does not climb.

But the great silver-tip, annoyed at any distraction now, rushed up and smote the pine till it quivered. Moisture dripped from his nostrils as he dropped and hurried on.

Through the snow drop and alder, through the clematis and syringa he pushed

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his way. Unnoticed were the kin-nik-in-nick, the huckleberry and the bear berry. Noticed only was that strange wild and seductive odor.

It grew more pervasive, and for the first time he paused deliberately. He reared up, drove his teeth into a lodgepole, and tore off the slab; dropped to the ground and sniffed.

He sniffed again, angrily. The pervasive odor was mingled with another. A male was with the female. He drew back his lips in a snarl, ground his teeth together.

There was a burn on the hillside where lightning had kindled the fire. The trees that stood were naked and black; and among the fallen timbers grew the huckleberries. Here it was that he espied the female, and with her, the male.

He did not will the struggle. He did not will it or refuse to will it. It was simply inevitable, like the rising and falling of the tides.

But he did not rush in. He went through that strange process of reconnoiter and indifference which is peculiar to grizzlies when they come together.

First he feigned absolute indifference, as

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though wholly unconscious of the others' presence. He stripped a huckleberry bush with his claws and carried the berries to his mouth. He slouched down the mountain for two rods, sniffed the air, and stepped a little closer.

The female betrayed absolutely no sign that he was near. Calmly she continued to feed. She stripped the bushes of good berries and bad, of weeds and stems, and carried the whole to her mouth, chewing noisily.

But her companion, while not stopping to stare and while continuing to feed, nevertheless maneuvered to stand between her and the new arrival.

A fallen pine lay back on the ground and Ursus the Terrible climbed upon it. Quickly he paced its length twice, then stopped and looked away. A low whine escaped him.

He leaped from the log and landed a full two yards nearer his antagonist. But still the latter gave no sign, save that the roach of hair on his shoulders flared.

He was big. The long and but slightly curved claws of his feet, though stained

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by the berries, resembled dagger points of strange amber. His pelage was streaked with mud, showing that he too had wallowed to escape the flies. His flanks were lean; and as he stepped, the mighty muscles of his hind legs could be seen to draw in below the rump.

His left ear was gone: a grim stigmata of an old fight when the slashing teeth of his antagonist had fallen short. Now only his eyes were alert: in their deep sockets the little balls glowed like round points of flame. But the flame was cold.

He showed no signs of fear because he knew it not. He likewise did not will the struggle, but he understood that it must come. In the fifteen years of his life he had gained confidence in the prodigious strength of his thews and the lightning stroke of his paws.

Ursus the Terrible took nine steps down the hill. He described a small circle and came up near the female. He reached her at right angles, and let his paw fall playfully on her shoulder.

But she turned impatiently and walked away. She also knew that the struggle had

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to come; but her manner of indifference showed that the outcome was immaterial.

As she stepped aside her place was taken by her recent mate, now no longer indifferent to his rival's presence. The two were now less than one yard apart, and face to face.

Ursus the Terrible was challenger and boldly faced his foe. His head of silver with its narrow forehead and long jaws was out-thrust, the blunt muzzle dripping above the open mouth. His ankles were tapering and graceful but the lines swept toward the shoulders in immeasurable muscularity.

From tip of nose to base of tail he measured just nine feet, and the girth of his mighty chest was five feet and nine inches. But for all his massive size his movements were swifter than the eye.

Quickly his weight shifted to his left foot, while the right lifted and his paw swung through the air. The other drew back and only the claws caught him in the ear. It was sheared away. His distorted earless head was hideous.

He countered by a shattering blow to the shoulder that numbed Ursus the Terrible

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profoundly. He was hurtled around, and with a wild snarl the antagonist closed in.

But recovery was instant. In his open mouth he snapped the paw that would strike him again and the deadly jaws closed down, crushing the foot to a pulp.

There was interruption. A frightened doe, hotly pressed by an unseen foe, leaped into the burn and in mad flight to escape bounded directly over the fighting bears. The grizzly, in fighting mood, charges all objects that move. And though the doe in midair saw them, she could not change her course. Quicker than her own swift flight was the action of the paw that flew up and struck her.

Ten feet away she fell; and as she struck the ground *Ursus the Terrible* was upon her. Nerves tight-strung he was now raging in the wild berserk fury that gave his kind the name "*horribilis*." He put foot on her neck, drew his hind legs up and sheared backwards with their tearing claws. He tore the slight animal clear in two, then whirled and charged his foe.

The female, mildly curious at this interruption, went over and sniffed the doe; then

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calmly squatted and began to feed upon her, oblivious of the fury that raged so near.

Ursus the Terrible was possessed of ten-fold fury. He raised to his hind feet, his outthrust head towering nine feet into the air, his jaws slavering crimson foam and his fore paws dripping blood. Like an avalanche he hurled himself against his foe.

But the latter met the charge with bold fury. Himself also a grizzly bear, he could take his punishment and inflict it too. He parried the fierce onslaught with a paw that struck like the release of bent pine, and with a twist of claws that laid the head of Ursus bare to the skull.

Then they hugged. Breasts together their muscle-hard front legs encircled each other and tightened. There was the dull snap of a broken bone, but the stab of sharp pain simply enraged Ursus the more.

Then he found his advantage and followed it up. The claws of both his feet were imbedded in his antagonist's back and held him firm: he could not twist sidewise to get at the neck. But the other's crushed paw hung limp; only the tight-drawn muscles held.

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Ursus the Terrible began slowly to work free of this foot, and to present his side to his foe. This accomplished he sank his teeth deep in the other's neck.

With this double hold to balance him, he whipped up his hind foot and raked cruelly down the belly. It was the end. There was a growl of pain as the other's hold relaxed and he fell to the ground.

Indescribably grisly and hideous, Ursus the Terrible turned inquiring eyes upon the female. She had gorged on the doe, and met his gaze with mild indifference. He took a step toward her.

Leisurely she arose and started aimlessly up the hill. He stood motionless, inquiring eyes following her. She took a few more steps, stopped, turned her head and looked at him playfully. Eagerly he followed. The two disappeared into the dense forest.

